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New York, 14-31 March 1994

AD HOC CONSULTATION ON THE ROLE OF REGIONAL FISHERY AGENCIES IN RELATION TO HIGH-SEAS FISHERY STATISTICS

SUMMARY

The Consultation was held at the Headquarters of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, La Jolla, California, United States of America, from 13 to 16 December 1993. The Consultation reviewed the high-seas statistics presently collated by regional fishery agencies and considered the data requirements for conservation and management of high-seas stocks. In particular, it used annex I of the negotiating text prepared by the Chairman of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks as the basis for elaborating the minimum data requirements for high-seas fisheries, which are relevant to the conservation of fish stocks as referred to in Article 119 (2) of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Other related issues were also considered. The report of the Consultation is published as FAO Fisheries Report No. 500.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Chairman of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (the United Nations Conference), Mr. Satya Nandan, participated. Fourteen participants from nine regional fishery agencies attended the Consultation. The Chairman of the Consultation was Mr. James Joseph, Director, Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC).

2. The main purpose of the Consultation was to specify the requirements for statistics on high-seas fisheries for research and management purposes, taking into account confidentiality needs and regional differences, and with particular reference to annex I of the negotiating text prepared by the Chairman of the United Nations Conference. 1/ Other tasks were to describe the statistics on high-seas fisheries routinely collated by various regional fishery agencies, to advise on the high-seas fisheries statistics which should be collated and disseminated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and to propose arrangements for the exchange of high-seas fishery statistics and information on the authorization of vessels to fish on the high seas between regional fishery agencies and FAO.

3. Mr. Nandan noted that the deliberations at the Consultation were central to some of the technical issues being addressed by the United Nations Conference and that the collection of high-seas fisheries data was essential as a basis for effective conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. He pointed out that the role of regional fishery agencies in relation to this would be crucial.

I. REVIEW OF STATISTICS COLLATED BY REGIONAL FISHERY AGENCIES

4. The activities of regional fishery agencies in relation to the collection and collation of high-seas fishery statistics were reviewed. Most agencies do not compile statistics for high-seas areas separately, although most can estimate the high-seas components by the allocation of statistical rectangles to high-seas zones as an approximation. The proportion of the catches recorded by regional fishery agencies which are from high-seas fisheries varies from almost 100 per cent in the Southern Ocean (Antarctic) to about 2 per cent for non-tuna fisheries in the North-east Atlantic. Most agencies compile data for the purpose of undertaking stock assessment as a basis for the provision of management advice. Although most agencies collate some data on discarded catches of fish and shellfish, the quality and coverage is generally poor. Very few agencies have information on incidental bycatches of birds and marine mammals. The cost to the agencies of conducting their statistical programmes (for exclusive economic zones as well as high seas) varies widely.

5. The Consultation noted that some important high-seas fisheries are not covered at the present time by active fishery agencies. These include the North Pacific (for Alaska pollack), the South-west Atlantic (for hake and squid), the South-east Atlantic (for horse mackerel and cape hakes), the South-west Pacific (for orange roughy), the South-east Pacific (for Chilean jack mackerel) and the

North-west Pacific (for tuna). The Consultation also noted a number of problems affecting regional fishery agencies with respect to high-seas fishery data.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR STATISTICS ON HIGH-SEAS FISHERIES

6. The Consultation recognized that regional fishery agencies are major users of fishery statistics, both for stock assessment and management purposes, and that they should, in consultation with their members, determine what data are collected.

7. The Consultation welcomed the specification of the roles of regional fishery agencies and flag States in the collection and exchange of data necessary to meet stock assessment requirements and support management objectives as provided in the negotiating text prepared by the Chairman of the United Nations Conference. It particularly welcomed the stipulation of minimum data requirements in annex I to the negotiating text which provides an important specification of the "data relevant to the conservation of fish stocks" as referred to in Article 119 (2) of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea as well as the general data requirements specified by the 1992 FAO Technical Consultation on High Sea Fishing. The negotiating text also takes into account the action and cooperation needed to address the inadequacies in fisheries statistics and data handling systems for the high seas, as noted by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

8. The Consultation agreed that there was a need to allow flexibility in standards in order to take account of the differing needs by region and species, but that annex I of the negotiating text provided a common framework for specifying standards. It was therefore agreed to use annex I as a basis upon which to elaborate the data requirements.

9. Recognizing the need for adequate data to be collected throughout the range of a stock, the Consultation decided to consider the data requirements for the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks as a whole, and not just the requirements for high-seas fishery data. It was considered important that common standards should apply to areas in both the exclusive economic zone and the high seas. The Consultation further agreed that these minimum standards should apply to all flag States, and not just to members of regional fishery agencies.

10. The Consultation recognized that reliable data on discards were essential for proper management and that the current availability of such data was inadequate. The Consultation recommended that discard statistics be collected by States and regional fishery agencies and that, where possible, their collection or validation should be through the use of observer programmes.

11. The Consultation agreed that a minimum statistical requirement should be the provision of nominal catch in terms of weight or numbers of fish, together with factors allowing the numbers to be converted into equivalent weight or vice versa. The nominal catch statistics should be accompanied by discard statistics and both should be specified by species, flag of vessel, gear type, area, time and stock; where specification by stock was not possible, the statistics should

be provided by FAO major fishing area or as close an approximation to it as possible. The time unit used for reporting these nominal catch and discard data should be the calendar year or a shorter time period. For seasonal fisheries traversing two calendar years, the statistics should be provided both in terms of calendar year and fishing season.

12. The Consultation agreed that another minimum statistical requirement was for effort and associated catch data. Effort data were required for three main purposes: (a) assessment analyses as an index of fishing mortality and for deriving abundance indices, (b) economic analysis and (c) management purposes. For effort and associated catch data, a finer level of spatial and temporal detail was required than for the nominal catch and discard statistics.

13. The Consultation agreed on a classification of fishing gears and associated units of effort. Five levels of priority were specified, each with different effort descriptors, depending on data availability. The catch (fish and non-fish) associated with the effort should be reported as nominal catch in terms of weight or numbers, together with appropriate conversion factors and with corresponding data for discards. Catches should be classified as retained catch or discards. The catch data by species and associated effort should be reported by flag of vessel, vessel size class, gear type, area and time. Where regional fishery agencies existed, they should specify the resolution of the data to be provided. For other areas, States should adopt criteria based on the resolution used by regional fishery agencies in adjacent areas and for similar stocks.

14. Owing to the complexities and difficulties in defining, collecting and interpreting economic data, the Consultation did not have sufficient time to consider this matter in detail. It was recommended that FAO should have the question of requirements for economic data investigated in an appropriate forum involving regional fishery agencies.

15. The Consultation believed that biological data were essential for stock assessment purposes and should be included in the minimum requirements. It was agreed that length compositions or weight compositions with associated weight/length conversion information for retained and discarded components of each species should be included in the minimum requirements. For some stocks or species, additional data, including sex, age and maturity compositions, were required for assessment purposes, and in such cases those data should also be included within the minimum requirements. The provision of biological parameters supporting stock assessments and the undertaking of other relevant research, including tagging experiments, surveys of abundance, biomass surveys, hydro-acoustic surveys, research on environmental factors affecting stock abundance and oceanographic and ecological data were also considered very important.

16. The importance of vessel data for management purposes was recognized. The Consultation agreed that the minimum requirements for data on all vessels fishing on the high seas, irrespective of size, should include, as essential, the items specified in the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High-seas ("the Flagging Agreement"), under Article VI, paragraph 1.

17. The Consultation also agreed that the items listed in paragraph 2 of the same article should be provided to the extent practicable. In addition, it was agreed that the fish preservation method (freezing in brine, drying, etc.), the hold capacity (in cubic metres), the rated speed (in knots) and the vessel marking (as referred to in article III, paragraph 6, of the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas) should also be included in the list of items to be provided to the extent practicable.

III. LOGISTICAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH DATA COLLECTION

18. States and regional fishery agencies have clearly established policies and standards with respect to maintaining the confidentiality of catch and related data, which is essential to maintain the full cooperation of industry and national statistical reporting offices and to ensure the reliability of data. The Consultation agreed that the primary responsibility for ensuring confidentiality of data provided to FAO should remain with the national authorities and regional fishery agencies.

19. The Consultation agreed that verification of data supplied on high-seas fisheries is essential. For fisheries subject to management, it was desirable to have real-time data, and the importance of data transmission by radio, facsimile or transponders installed on fishing vessels was recognized.

20. The Consultation noted that in some cases developing coastal States lacked the financial and technical resources to collect reliable fishery statistics. In such cases the international community was called upon to assist those States financially and/or technically to develop the capability to collect such information.

21. The Consultation agreed that every effort should be made to ensure that the current statistical reporting requirements of regional fishery agencies and FAO were met. These requirements were that: (a) nominal catch data should be compiled and submitted to regional fishery agencies and/or FAO with no more than a six-month time lag, and (b) effort and associated catch data should be submitted with no more than a nine-month time lag. These time limits referred to the submission of data for statistical purposes and not for fisheries management control purposes.

IV. HIGH-SEAS FISHERIES STATISTICS TO BE COLLATED BY FAO

22. The 1992 Technical Consultation on High Seas Fishing considered that FAO could coordinate the compilation of aggregated data for high-seas fishing. Such aggregated data would serve three main purposes, in that it would (a) provide a basis for describing fishing activity taking place on the high seas, (b) serve to describe global trends in high-seas fisheries and (c) indicate how effort might shift from one fishery to another in response to changes such as fishery restrictions. The Consultation agreed that catch and effort data should be

provided to FAO on a stock basis, subdivided into high-seas and exclusive-economic-zone components, and where possible on a finer scale.

23. The regional fishery agencies concerned with tuna generally collect more reliable fishery statistics for the catch and effort of tuna vessels than are held at national level. Because FAO will require data identified separately for the high seas, and because the most meaningful aggregation would be at the stock level, the Consultation recommended that for tuna and tuna-like species, regional fishery agencies should provide FAO with nominal catch, discard and effort data by species, stock area, FAO major fishing area (this will in some cases be an approximation), inside/outside the exclusive economic zone, gear type and year. The effort unit would be that considered most appropriate by the regional fishery agency. The stock area would correspond to that recognized by the agency and would be specified in terms of 5°x 5° rectangles.

24. For other species, FAO could request corresponding catch and effort data for straddling stocks from regional fishery agencies where they existed. These data should be defined in terms of the agency's statistical divisions. Many areas are not covered by active regional agencies, so this would necessitate FAO requesting data directly from national sources.

V. EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION CONCERNING THE AUTHORIZATION OF VESSELS TO FISH ON THE HIGH SEAS

25. The Consultation welcomed the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas, approved by the Twenty-seventh Session of the FAO Conference in November 1993, and stressed the importance for all States whose vessels fish on the high seas to accede to it.

26. The Consultation acknowledged that FAO would provide regional fishery agencies with a list of vessels authorized to fish on the high seas, subject to any restrictions imposed by contracting parties providing the information as specified in the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas. Similarly, the Consultation agreed that agencies should, where possible, provide FAO with a list of vessels operating within their respective Convention areas. In this way both FAO and the regional fishery agencies would be in a position to compare vessel lists and detect discrepancies.

27. The Consultation further agreed that regional fishery agencies should exchange information among themselves concerning non-party vessels known to be fishing in the Convention areas of other regional fishery agencies.

Notes

1/ A/48/479, annex II; originally issued as A/CONF.164/13.